

Holy Thursday

Saturday night after mass somebody gave me a \$20 bill and said, "I know you're going to the Royals home opener this week. Have a beer on me." Someone else gave me a \$50 bill and said, "This is for you, and I have \$20 for the deacon." Believe me, this does not happen every week. Then someone gave me \$10 and said, "This is from the cookies sales," and someone else gave me \$25 and said, "This is for two masses, one for my wife and one for my mother." As soon as I could, I wrote down who gave me what and why. Otherwise, when I get back to the rectory, I'd have \$105 in my pocket, and I would not be able to remember how many people gave me what sums for what purpose. It all came in cash - nothing in writing, and I had to remember it all. My memory is good, but it's not that good.

Memory is something we lose as we get older. All of us will lose memory. I pray that when it happens to me, there will be people who love me enough to put up with me and be happy that I'm still around, even if I have no idea who they are.

Holy Thursday night is all about memory. "Do this in memory of me," Jesus said. One reason he said that is because of today's first reading about the first passover, which concludes with these words: "This day shall be a memorial feast for you, which all generations will celebrate."

Here's how the Passover came to be. Some descendants of Abraham lived in Egypt, and a new Pharaoh made them slaves. They cried to the Lord for freedom, and God helped them. God knew that Pharaoh would not let them go out of kindness, so he got Pharaoh's attention a different way: plagues. God thought, "If Pharaoh's life is miserable, he will let Israel go free just to get rid of them." God sent not one plague, but ten: The water of the Nile turned into blood. Frogs entered the palace, the bedroom, the bed, the homes of servants, their ovens and their bowls. Gnats came upon human beings and beasts. Swarms of flies entered homes and devastated the land. Pestilence took the lives of horses, donkeys, camels, herds and flocks. Boils festered on human beings and beasts. Hail fell so fiercely that it killed human beings and animals in the field. A swarm of locusts covered the whole land, making it look black, eating vegetation, and filling the houses. For three days there came upon the land a darkness so thick that people could feel it, and could not move. That's where today's reading begins: Before the tenth plague, the death of the firstborn of every human family and of every animal, God told Israel how they could escape. They should take a lamb "and then, with the whole assembly of Israel present, it shall be slaughtered during the evening twilight. They shall take some of its blood and apply it to the two doorposts and the lintel of every house." The destroying angel would pass over those homes.

Passover proclaims this message: God is more powerful than any danger. God can make life difficult for those who afflict us. Even so, God worried that we would forget. When you are in trouble, you may doubt that God can help you. You may despair and make the wrong choice. It's because you forgot the past. God wants one thing of you. God wants you to remember - to remember the Passover, and to remember Jesus. In every mass we remind ourselves and tell the next generation that in spite of whatever makes us slaves - money, lust, pornography, drugs, or bad relationships - God can save us if we remember.

Thursday, April 13, 2017